

# UNTOLD

STORY LEADS FROM MONTANA



FALL 2003 • visitmt.com

## The Trail of the Great BEER

What a difference a vowel makes. Montana has long been known for being part of the "Trail of the Great BEAR," an international trail traversing 2,085 miles of the wild Rockies celebrating the spirit of the Great Bear, the Grizzly. But "Trail of the Great BEER"? Why not?

Montana has terrific beer...in at least fifteen microbreweries across the state and any number of brewpubs that have sprouted up to support their efforts.

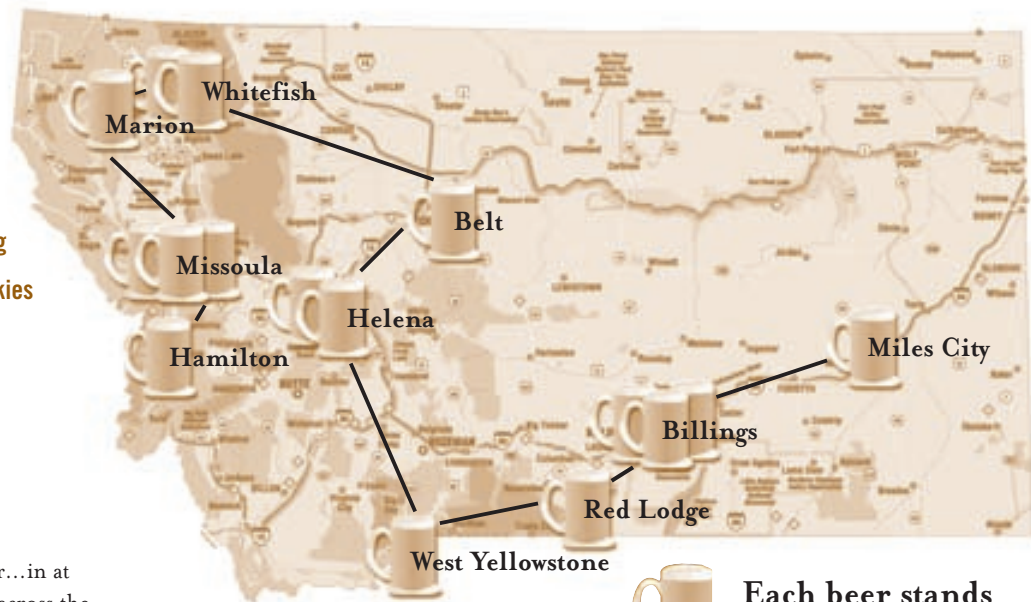
The trail starts in Miles City in southeastern Montana, where the Milestown Brewery is happy to pour you a pint of their Milestown Amber at the Golden Spur.

Proceed west along the beautiful Yellowstone River to Billings, where Himmelberger Brewing Company's draft is unfiltered, keg conditioned, and only found in a few brewpubs and restaurants around the city. Then it is on to the Yellowstone Valley Brewing Company to try their flagship brew Grizzly Wulff Wheat. Use it to wash down one of their wickedly

satisfying Black Widow Bratwursts. In downtown Billings you'll find the Montana Brewing Company. Their specialties include Wild Wheat, Blind Boar Amber and Custer's Last Stout.

Now head south to Red Lodge. Set in the shadow of the Beartooth Mountains, H&H Brewing has been making their Beartooth Pale and Glacier ales since 1998.

From there, travel the dizzying heights of Beartooth Pass, through Yellowstone Park (be on the lookout for wildlife), to West Yellowstone. Wolf Pack Brewing Company specializes in traditional German



Each beer stands for a brewery

beers, importing their ingredients from Germany. According to their brewmaster, German visitors swear by the authenticity of the Old Snaggletooth Schwarzbier, Lone Mountain Alt, and other beers when they visit.

Now set your direction north to Montana's capital city, Helena. On Last Chance Gulch, the Blackfoot River Brewery (named for the river made famous in Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It") carefully handcrafts beer

Cont. p.4

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Northeast Montana Grows Pumpkins and Companies

Koo-Koo-Sint Bighorn Sheep Viewing Area

Red or White Wine with Rattlesnake Croquettes?

In Montana Museums, Bigger is Better

First They Carved Ducks. Then, They Carved a Niche

The Lewis & Clark Trail. Now Yours.

# Northeast Montana Grows Pumpkins and Companies.

**Northeast Montana, long known for Fort Peck Lake and sweeping vistas, is quickly gaining a reputation for something else: growing businesses. But in Northeast Montana, the people don't launch boring, run-of-the-mill companies. Instead, they're building unique, innovative businesses with products such as pumpkins, granola, wine and luffas.**

Annette Thiel of Sidney is a young mother, a student, a trucker...and an entrepreneur. Over the past 10 years, she has created a vegetable farm that now encompasses 80 acres (including thousands of pumpkins) and distributes to three states.

Maybe it's something about Sidney. Not far away from Annette's vegetable farm is Chum Creek Granola, launched by Sidney entrepreneur Jody Kappel in January of

2001. He converted the basement of his home into a granola factory, using local honey ("The best in the world, bar none," he has said), safflower oil and oats to produce his unique, soft granola.



*Fresh granola, straight from Sidney*

In Culbertson, George and Roxanne Nickoloff opened Rolling Hills Winery in February of 2003. The winery produces wild plum, blueberry, raspberry and choke-cherry wine using locally grown fruit. And, expansion plans are already in the works: this summer, the winery will add honey and rhubarb wine, as well as apple wine in the fall.

Near Glendive, Amy Deinas saw opportunity in luffas. Luffas, the "sponges" so popular as exfoliators at spas and salons, actually come from the luffa gourd—which Amy grows on her farm. Since launching "Whoopup Creek Luffas," aimed at the health and beauty market, Amy has also created scented luffa soaps as a product extension.

Unique, interesting ideas for business ventures? Certainly. But then, that's the kind of thinking Montana inspires. To find out more about these products, contact Eastern Plains RC&D Area, Inc. at 406-433-5024.

## Koo-Koo-Sint Bighorn Sheep Viewing Area

It ain't football these rams are playing in the fall but their head gear is as good as any helmet worn in the NFL.

It's bighorn sheep mating season in Montana and these big boys mean business. Weighing in at up to 300 pounds, they charge their rivals at 20 miles per hour, butting heads in a struggle for herd dominance. This violent sport can be heard miles away as their distinctive curved horns collide.

One of the best places to watch the "big game" is the Koo-Koo-Sint Bighorn Sheep Viewing Area just outside of Thompson Falls, Montana. As part of the Lolo National Forest, the area has interpretive signs that describe the natural history of the bighorn sheep, their habitat, and the geology of the valley.

Bighorn sheep used to be found throughout the west from Canada into Mexico but today can only be seen in a few areas. That is what makes Koo-Koo-Sint so remarkable—during the peak viewing months of October through December anywhere from seventy to one hundred animals may be grazing in the mountain meadow just off Highway 200.

The bighorn sheep, related to the "Old World" ibex, are exceptionally social as a group. At least the females are. After spending the summer together high in the craggy cliffs, they travel down the mountain as winter approaches to forage for grasses and leaves. The rams, which have been off on their own since the spring, join up with the ewes in this

high mountain meadow just as they go into their rut. And that, shall we say, is when the game begins.

For more information about the viewing area or bighorn sheep, contact the Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District, Lolo National Forest at (406-826-3821) or Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks at (406-827-4389).

Thompson Falls lies nestled in a quiet valley along the beautiful Clark Fork River and offers a multitude of attractions and accommodations. With a population of about 1350, it is situated in northwest Montana along Highway 200 next to the Idaho border and approximately 100 miles from Missoula, Montana (airport). For accommodations and other information log on to [www.visitmt.com](http://www.visitmt.com).



*Two horns: standard equipment on all bighorn rams.*



## Should I Have the Red or the White Wine With the Rattlesnake Croquettes?

October 24, 2003. In Ennis, it's almost time for hunting season. And, time for the annual Ennis Hunters Feed and Wild Game Cook-Off. Started as a way to empty the freezer and make room for the coming season's bounty, the event has become a tradition. In fact, it's now the official kick-off to hunting season and a way of welcoming visiting hunters to the Madison Valley.

Serving their culinary creations on Main Street, the local merchants and staff compete for prizes with dishes like Moose Enchiladas, Black Bear Burgers, Antelope Kabobs, Chipotle Goat Pepper Steak, Mountain Lion Pizza, and Creamy Deer Fudge. There is also a

category for "most interesting" dish. And do dishes in this category have to taste good, as well? "Well no," says event organizer Steve Kack, "but it sure helps." The diners are the judges, voting for favorites as they nosh up and down the main drag.

And, it's free. It's free? "Sure is," says Mr.

Kack. "At first we wanted to use it as a fund-raiser, but now it is just all about having fun." After seventeen years they have that part of it down pat, according to locals.

For more information about this event, contact the Ennis Area Chamber of Commerce at 406-682-4388, [info@ennischamber.com](mailto:info@ennischamber.com). For accommodations and other information log on to [www.visitmt.com](http://www.visitmt.com).



*Ah, the smell of fresh antelope chili.*

## In Montana Museums, Bigger is Better

We all know she sells seashells from the seashore. But in Broadus, Montana, R.D. "Mac" McCurdy amassed a collection of 22,000 seashells—even though he was thousands of miles from the nearest seashore.

How? It all started when he and his wife traveled to Dover, Delaware in 1927, according to Mac's son Bob McCurdy. "Then Dad collected from all over the world, including Korea and the Philippines."

The collector's bug bit Mac long before 1927. Back in 1905, he started with a nest of bird eggs, and soon began collecting arrowheads, rocks, butterflies and other artifacts. In 1992, the Powder River Historical Society Museum acquired Mac's collection and gave it its own building. The Museum also houses other collections in its saddle room, barber-shop, soda fountain, bank, and homestead kitchen, among others.

But seashell collections aren't the only things that grow big in this part of Montana. In nearby Baker, the main attraction at

O'Fallon County Museum is "Steer Montana," the largest cow ever. Born March 23, 1923, Steer Montana grew to 5 feet, 11 inches high, 10 feet, 4 inches long and 3,980 pounds (a record that still stands today). The museum also houses unique collections ranging from drug store sundries to transistor radios to dinosaur fossils.

For more information, contact the Powder River Historical Society Museum at 406-436-2977, or O'Fallon Historical Museum at 406-778-3265.



*Steer Montana, the heavyweight champ.*

## First, They Carved Ducks. Then, They Carved a Niche.

Like so many business success stories, it began with a dream. Unlike so many of those stories, however, it also began with a few ducks. Twenty-three years ago, when the father-and-son team of Eric and Marc Pierce decided to combine their passion for collecting with their passion for nature, Big Sky Carvers was born in Manhattan, Montana.

In the early years, the company focused on carving ornamental decoys, earning a reputation (and a growing legion of fans) for its craftsmanship and detail. As word of the company spread, so did its offerings. In 1991, they added Meissenburg Designs, a collection of traditional and humorous signs for the home and lodge. Then, it was cabin carvings (wood carvings of bears and friends), home furnishings, sculptures, and even home accents. Today, just slightly more than two decades after the founding of Big Sky Carvers, the company offers some



*photo courtesy Big Sky Carvers*

*Another carving takes flight.*

1,500 products reflecting the Montana lifestyle, with retail stores across the United States (including a flagship store at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota) carrying its products.

Arguably, Big Sky Carvers is the most successful carving company in the world. Yet it's still, in many ways, a family business: co-founder Marc Pierce is still the company CEO. Of course, the Big Sky Carvers family is much larger now; more than 50 artisans create unique, one-of-a-kind carvings by crafting wood into the shapes of playful bears, adorable moose, lifelike dogs and other animals. More than a dozen affiliated artists and sculptors also offer workshops and special collections of bronze sculptures, dinnerware, tables, and unique holiday ornaments and decorations.

Not bad for a couple of guys who just wanted to carve a few ducks.

To find out more about Big Sky Carvers, visit [www.bigskycarvers.com](http://www.bigskycarvers.com).

# BEER TOUR continued...

seven barrels at a time. Try the Blackfoot River Gold Organic Pale Ale or their Northfork Organic Porter.

Also in Helena, Sleeping Giant Brewery's Tumbleweed IPA was named the "Best IPA in the Country" at the most recent American Beer Festival. They've also recently introduced Lewis & Clark Lager for the Corps of Discovery's bicentennial.

Head north again, this time toward Great Falls. You'll see the same landscape Lewis and Clark saw as they paddled up the Missouri in 1804. At Great Falls, head west 25 miles to the tiny town of Belt and the Harvest Moon Brewery. Their Pigs Ass Porter is exceptional, both in name and in taste. On a lighter scale is its sister brew, Beltian White, described by one aficionado as "a microbrew with training wheels."

Next stop: Whitefish. On the way to the Flathead Valley, you'll travel north along the eastern front of the Rockies, through the beautiful Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and over the Going-To-Sun Highway in Glacier National Park.

Once you're in Whitefish, head for the Great Northern Brewing Company tasting room. Like most of Montana's micro-brews, the names of their beers reflect the local area: Buckin' Horse Pilsner, Wheatfish, and Wild Huckleberry, infused with the flavor of a local berry favored by bears in

the surrounding mountains.

Next stop is Whitefish Brewing for some of their Montana Nut Brown Ale or Montana Cream Ale. They also offer a special Montana Porter exclusively on draft. The brewery is nestled at the foot of Big Mountain Resort and is a favorite with the winter ski crowd.

Just southwest of Whitefish, Marion is home to the Lang Creek Brewery. Since the owner has two great loves—flying and beer—the brewery is housed in a converted airplane hangar. Being described as "America's Most Remote Brewery" hasn't keep their Lang Creek Tri-Motor from winning medals three years in a row at the American Association of Brewers Competition.

Turning south again, travel past Flathead Lake (the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi) to Missoula, considered by some the Mecca of brew towns in the state. Big Sky Brewing provides the state's top selling microbrew: Moose Drool, a dark ale that's chocolate brown with a creamy texture. They also offer Scapegoat Ale and Slow Elk Stout.

Move on to the experimental (and experiential) Kettlehouse Brewing. In addition to their standby beers, you may find Pumpkin Ale or Ginseng Pale Ale on tap alongside a local favorite, Olde Bongwater Hemp Porter.



Across town, Bayern Brewing crafts beers in strict accordance with the German Law of Purity of 1516 (Reinheitsgebot). That means no berries, adjuncts, artificial carbonation, pasteurization, or other such ingredients. Try the seasonal Flathead Lake Monster and Trout Slayer, along with the traditional Bayern Ales and Pilsner.

Continue south to the Bitterroot Valley and Hamilton's Bitter Root Brewing. It is a simple place with a big claim: "The Last Best Brew."

And even though that's the end of the "Trail of the Great BEER," it doesn't have to be the end of the journey; many of these beers are on draft at pubs throughout the west, and some are bottled for national distribution. So, next time you want a cold one, ask for one of ours by name.

## Happy trails...

For more information on Montana breweries, log on to [www.visitmt.com](http://www.visitmt.com) and search using the word breweries.

*This article is meant only as a suggestion of where you can find and taste Montana fashioned micro-brews. If you decide to follow the "Trail," please have a designated driver and drink responsibly.*

*We want your experience to be pleasant and safe.*

## The Lewis & Clark Trail. Now Yours.

Now you can follow the trail of Lewis and Clark. Literally. The new North Shore Trail at Great Falls travels the Lewis and Clark Heritage Greenway, offering 11 miles of access to the Missouri River for hikers and bikers. According to Dan Smith of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the trail parallels the route Lewis traveled on June 14, 1804 as he searched for the "great falls" of the Missouri.

The trail includes two interpretive nature hikes: the Crooked Falls Nature Trail and the North Shore Trail Interpretive Hike. Both hikes point out flora and fauna Lewis documented.

For more information, contact: The Lewis and Clark National Trail Interpretive Center (406-727-8733), Giant Springs State Park Interpretive Specialist Chris Dantic (406-727-1212) or Doug Wicks, Recreation Trails (406-788-3313).

## FROM MONTANA

The diversity of events, places and people in Montana is almost as wide as the state itself. We hope to give you a taste of that diversity with this quarterly newsletter. In addition, the following services are offered to editors, writers and producers:

### Visual Materials

Color slides and stock video footage are available for editorial use.

### Writer/Photographer Referrals

We can put you in contact with many of Montana's most talented and experienced freelance writers and photographers.

### Editorial Copy/Calendar of Events

We can provide background information or editorial copy for many subjects. We also maintain a calendar of events for the entire state.

### Individual Attention

If you need the latest vacation guide and road map of Montana, a liaison with other government agencies or detailed information to fit a specific story angle, we're here to assist you.

Contact Donnie Sexton, Publicity/Photography  
[publicity@visitmt.com](mailto:publicity@visitmt.com) / 406-841-2897